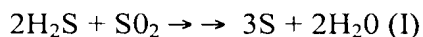


IN THE CLAIMS

Please amend the claims as follows:

1. (Currently Amended) A process for the production of sulfur, ~~obtained in pure form, also easily disposable at ambient temperature,~~ starting from the hydrogen sulphide contained in natural gas, which ~~includes~~ comprises:

- a) oxidizing part of the hydrogen sulphide to sulfur dioxide;
- b) preparing a solution by dissolving in water the ~~obtained~~ sulfur dioxide obtained in step (a);
- c) carrying out the following reaction (I):



~~by reacting making the remaining~~ hydrogen sulphide remaining in the natural gas to react with the solution prepared in step (b) to provide a sulfur suspension; and

- d) isolating sulfur from using the ~~thus obtained~~ sulfur suspension ~~for the production of sulfur~~ or, alternatively, ~~using it for the disposal of the sulfur itself~~ disposing of said sulfur suspension in a site reserved for such purpose,

wherein the hydrogen sulphide is oxidized to SO<sub>2</sub> by directly burning a mixture of methane and hydrogen sulphide as it exits from an extraction well, without pretreatment with alkanolamine, in presence of a substoichiometric quantity of oxygen.

2. (Original) The process, according to claim 1, wherein the hydrogen sulphide is recovered from the natural gas by means of absorption with amines.

3. (Original) The process, according to claim 1 or 2, wherein the hydrogen sulphide has a concentration higher than 90%.

4. (Currently Amended) The process, according to claim 1 or 2 ~~1, 2 or 3~~, wherein part of the stream containing hydrogen sulphide, between 5 and 35% of the total volume, is absorbed in solution of alkanolamine ~~alcanolamine~~, deadsorbed and then oxidized to  $\text{SO}_2$  and dissolved in water.

5. (Cancelled)

6. (Currently Amended) The process according to claim 1 ~~5~~, wherein the oxidation is carried out in the presence of a catalyst consisting essentially of  $\text{Nb}_2\text{O}_5$  and/or  $\text{CeO}_2$  and/or  $\text{MoO}_3$  supported onto  $\text{TiO}_2$ .

7. (Currently Amended) The process, according to claim 1 ~~5~~, wherein the reaction mixture containing  $\text{SO}_2$  is bubbled through a layer of water.

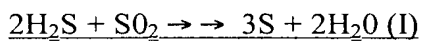
8. (Original) The process, according to claim 7, wherein the natural gas containing hydrogen sulphide is subsequently bubbled in the sulfur dioxide solution in water, obtaining the formation of a stable suspension of sulfur in water.

9. (Currently Amended) The process, according to Claim 1 ~~any of the previous claims~~, wherein the reaction (I) takes place at a temperature equal to or lower than room temperature.

10. (Currently Amended) The process, according to ~~any of the previous claims~~ Claim 1, wherein the ~~thus obtained~~ sulfur suspension is treated by ultrasounds, with the ~~scope~~ effect of disaggregating it, decreasing the dimension of its particles and increasing ~~the its~~ its stability in over time ~~of the thus obtained suspension of sulfur in water~~.

11. (Currently Amended) ~~The process, according to any of the previous claims, A~~  
process for the production of sulfur starting from the hydrogen sulphide contained in natural  
gas, which includes:

- a) oxidizing part of the hydrogen sulphide to sulfur dioxide;
- b) preparing a solution by dissolving in water the sulfur dioxide obtained in (a);
- c) carrying out the following reaction (I):



by reacting hydrogen sulphide remaining in the natural gas to react with the solution prepared  
in (b) to provide a sulfur suspension;

wherein the suspension of sulfur ~~in water~~ is disposed in a geologic structure by means  
of injection in a porous matrix, ~~even at ambient temperature or, in any case, or a fracture or~~  
by injection under hydraulic fracturing conditions, at a temperature lower than the melting  
point of sulfur.

12. (Currently Amended) The process, according to Claim 11 ~~any of the previous~~  
~~claims from 1 to 10~~, wherein the suspension of sulfur in water is disposed in a geologic  
structure, by means of injection in a fracture ~~even at ambient temperature or, in any case, at a~~  
~~temperature lower than the melting point of sulfur.~~

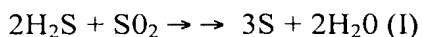
13. (Currently Amended) The process, according to Claim 11 ~~any of the previous~~  
~~claims from 1 to 10~~, wherein the suspension of sulfur in water is disposed in a geologic  
structure by means of injection under hydraulic fracturing conditions, ~~even at ambient~~  
~~temperature or, in any case, at a temperature lower than the melting point of sulfur.~~

14. (Cancelled)

15. (New) The process according to Claim 11, wherein the suspension of sulfur in water is disposed in a geologic structure by injection in a porous matrix.

16. (New) A process for the production of a sulfur suspension starting from hydrogen sulphide contained in natural gas, which comprises:

- a) oxidizing part of the hydrogen sulphide to sulfur dioxide;
- b) preparing a solution by dissolving in water the sulfur dioxide obtained in (a);
- c) carrying out the following reaction (I):



by reacting hydrogen sulphide remaining in the natural gas with the solution prepared in (b) to provide the sulfur suspension,

wherein the hydrogen sulphide is oxidized to  $\text{SO}_2$ , by directly burning a mixture of methane and hydrogen sulphide as it exits from an extraction well, without pretreatment with alkanolamine, in presence of a substoichiometric quantity of oxygen.

17. (New) The process, according to claim 1, wherein sulfur is isolated from the sulfur suspension.

18. (New) The process, according to claim 2, wherein sulfur is isolated from the sulfur suspension.

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19. (New) The process, according to claim 3, wherein sulfur is isolated from the sulfur suspension.